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The Capacity and Willingness to Act

Two Constitutive Elements of Strategy Design

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Abstract

Given the amount of suffering in the world, do we have the capacity to provide the necessary humanitarian assistance? Assuming that this is the case: are both the governments and the populations willing to carry that burden in the future as they have done in the past? In order to answer these interrelated questions accurately, we suggest the concept of capacity and willingness as two constitutive elements of strategy design and we will sketch the framework in which these strategies should be embedded. We assume, that both the capacity and willingness to act in order to prevent and mitigate humanitarian disasters vary with respect to the different risks enumerated. Accordingly, it is required to identify different types of disasters and the specific risks associated with them. Following this survey strategies and their two components, capacity and willingness, will be discussed by combining them with the types of risks identified. This leads directly to identify the actors which should or could implement the strategies. Lessons learned from past experience reveal that even though the capacity to act is possibly underestimated the willingness to act is overestimated as far as the governmental actors are concerned.

Zusammenfassung

Besteht vor dem Hintergrund weltweiter Katastrophen und des damit verbundenen Leidens die Fähigkeit der notwendigen humanitären Hilfe? Und wenn dem so ist, besitzen sowohl die Regierungen als auch die Gesellschaften die Bereitschaft, weiterhin die Lasten bzw. Kosten dieser humanitären Politik zu tragen? Um diese Fragen angemessen beantworten zu können, wird das Zwillingskonzept von Fähigkeit und Bereitschaft vorgestellt, zwei konstitutive Elemente politischer Strategien bezüglich der humanitären Hilfe wie auch der Prävention. Es wird angenommen, daß die Fähigkeit und die Bereitschaft des Handelns entsprechend der Katastrophen und der damit verbundenen Risiken variieren. Folgerichtig müssen sowohl die unterschiedlichen Katastrophen als auch die damit einhergehenden Risiken identifiziert werden. Dies führt dann in einem weiteren Schritt zur Frage, welche Akteure mit welchen Problemen konfrontiert sind und wie sich spezifische Strategien bezüglich der Bewältigung von Not implementieren lassen. Die Erfahrung der Vergangenheit deutet darauf hin, daß die Fähigkeit zum Handeln möglicherweise unterschätzt wird, während gleichzeitig die Bereitschaft zur humanitären Hilfe und Prävention, zumindest der Regierungen, eher überschätzt wird.

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1. Is suffering inevitable?[1]

Given the amount of suffering in the world, do we have the capacity to provide the necessary humanitarian assistance? Assuming that this is the case: are both the governments and the populations willing to carry that burden in the future as they have done in the past? The capacity for humanitarian assistance is considerable. In light of the huge sums that have been spent over the past years the willingness to provide disaster relief seems beyond any doubt. But this is only part of the truth. Are all human disasters inevitable? The answer is clearly no. In some cases, the will to act is obviously limited. According to Hendrickson (1998:10) "the strategic rationale for aid has increasingly been linked to the disengagement from crisis regions by richer countries and to the adoption of policies which [...] seek to contain the crisis". That means that a negative correlation exists between the political willingness to deal with the causes of disasters, which has declined, and the political will to deal with their effects, i. e. the humanitarian disasters themselves, which have increased.

Against this background, the problem of political strategies and operational space can not be dealt with properly unless we have clarified first what the purpose of designing strategies is or should be. If the starting point are the humanitarian disasters themselves, this option necessarily leads to what we may call a *managerial approach*. Under these conditions humanitarian disasters are conceptually and substantively isolated from the political and social context in which they occur. If in contrast humanitarian disasters are primarily viewed as a failure of politics, strategies must address the causes as well. In this case we speak of a *political approach to international order and stability*. Obviously such an approach incorporates conceptually humanitarianism (represented by the humanitarian organizations) with international politics (power relations and norms regulating the behavior of states and non-state actors).

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[1] This paper is part of the ongoing project on the "Politics of Humanitarian Aid", financed by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft.

In the following paper strategies are understood as means for risk reduction. If their design is more than a purely intellectual exercise one has to take into account both the capacity as well as the willingness of the actors to reduce risks in a given policy field. The international humanitarian relief system comprises two sets of actors we assume to be complementary: governmental and nongovernmental actors. Complementarity implies by definition role complementarity. Thus, the strategies must logically be complementary as well. Complementarity is reflected in the division of labor between the governmental and nongovernmental actors. To simplify matters one can argue that the role of the role of the former is primarily related to the maintenance of international order and stability whereas the role of the latter is the delivery of humanitarian relief. That includes both the prevention of political disasters on the one hand, the support and protection of humanitarian assistance on the other.

In our paper we will first sketch the framework in which strategies should be embedded. In a next step we will outline the different types of disasters and the specific risks associated with them. Following this survey strategies and their two components, capacity and willingness, will be discussed by combining them with the types of risks identified. This discussion will lead us directly to identify the actors which should or could implement the strategies. We will finally briefly review the capacity and willingness to act from the vantage point of the framework developed and identify the critical elements for the strategy design.

2. Strategies for what?

The goal of humanitarian assistance is to bring relief to individuals who find themselves in a life threatening situation they cannot overcome by themselves. The guiding principles of this activity are neutrality, impartiality, and independence. These principles have led to the characterization of humanitarian assistance as an unpolitical activity. This is true to the extent that the victim is the exclusive focus. Whoever finds herself or himself in a life threatening situation such as famine, an epidemic, or armed con-

flict is entitled to help. This *individualistic perspective* legitimizes the existence and activities of the humanitarian organizations wherever a disaster occurs. The question in this case is not why a disaster took place but rather how to overcome as quickly as possible human suffering. Yet this perspective is incomplete.

The complementary view is what we have called a *collective perspective*. The philosopher Luc Ferry (1996:126) has formulated this point of view as follows: "... *sur le plan politique* (emphasis in the orig.), elle (l'action humanitaire, WDE/SC) traduit l'exigence d'une solidarité avec l'humanité entière...". One particular human right has bridged the gap between this philanthropic philosophy and politics as far as humanitarianism is concerned: the right to life. This particular human right is truly universal and at the same time ideologically and politically neutral. From the moral or normative standpoint this collective perspective implies both entitlements and obligations. The victim is unconditionally entitled to relief. The obligation is to provide not only relief but the obligation to guarantee this right as well. The latter is not a specific humanitarian issue but the most basic principle of any system of international governance worth that name. The political issue is therefore how risks can be reduced with respect to the occurrence of disasters as well as their consequences. If humanitarian disasters can not be prevented the obligation is to reduce both the damage and the ensuing consequences.

The preliminary conclusion is that political strategies in this particular policy field should focus both on the capacity and willingness to prevent humanitarian disasters, to guarantee relief if they are unavoidable, and to prevent follow-up political disasters if possible. The first and the third aspect reveal that humanitarian disasters must be conceptually be embedded in a broader political framework.

3. Disasters: Types and Risks

The objects of prevention and relief are the different kinds of disasters, their actual or potential consequences. We define a disaster simply as an event with a high probability to cause human and/or material losses in a given geographical area (Eberwein/Chojnacki, 1998:9). This is the most parsimonious definition we can think of. It limits disasters to a group of people, unable to avoid its immediate impact. The definition avoids any reference to the ability of a community or the society at large to deal with the consequences. In contrast to other definitions provided by the International Federation of the Red Cross or the former UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs our disaster definition has omitted vulnerability as a constitutive element. Vulnerability is a complex concept which caries with it a variety of connotations. It is both a property of the disaster (occurrence and damage) and the risk a particular community of people is exposed to should a disaster occur. The latter notion emphasizes the societal and/or political context. From the analytical point of view vulnerability can be conceptualized as a contextual property of disaster occurrence and diffusion. This leads to the assumption that disasters of any kind are more likely to have disruptive effects within vulnerable states.

Two types of disasters can be distinguished: natural disasters and human made disasters.[2] This dimension can be combined with a second one, their duration: short term vs. long term. Combining these two dimensions gives us four types of disasters. We have used this typology based upon the data collection by CRED (cf. Sapir, 1991), adding on to them human made disasters that are related to violence, i. e. interstate military conflicts and wars as well as domestic violence or wars of the third kind, as Holsti (1996) calls them, from other sources (Eberwein/Chojnacki, 1998).[3] The various types are listed in Table 1.

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[2] We are well aware of the fact that this distinction is not as straightforward as it seems. In particular the causes of disasters may vary. So called natural disasters may be caused by human behavior and vice versa, i. e. draughts by global climate change and violence as a consequence of a drought. Nevertheless this distinction makes sense in that it directly and exclusively refers to the event itself and its origin.

[3] The description can be found in Eberwein/Chojnacki (1998:17-25).

Table 1: Types of Disasters

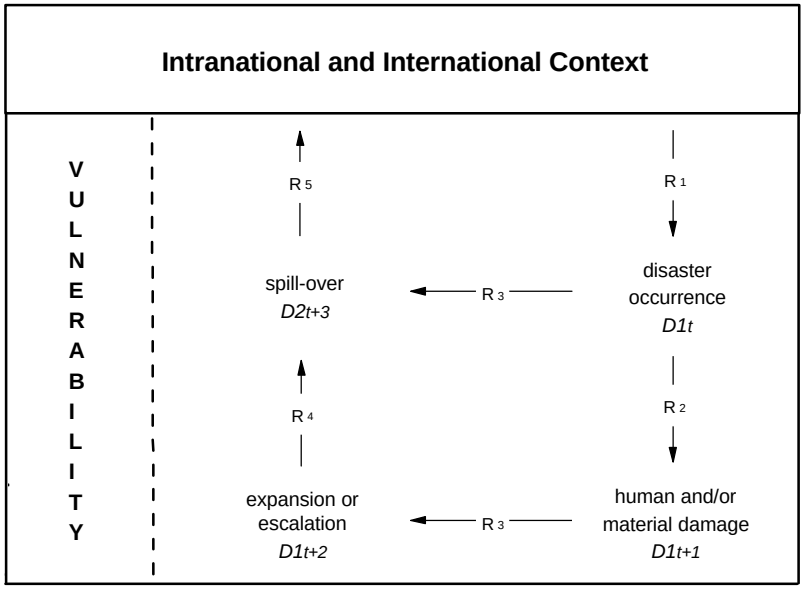
Short-Term Natural	Short-Term Human Made
Geological Origin (e.g. earthquake, landslide, volcano, avalanche, tsunami) Hydro-Meteorological Origin (extreme weather, high winds, floods)	Accidents (e.g. technical disasters) Chemical accidents Nuclear accidents
Long-Term Natural	**Long-Term Human Made**
Epidemic diseases Insect infestations Droughts	Famine, Food shortage Interstate conflicts Domestic violence

Given the issue of disaster occurrence every society is confronted with different kinds of risks. We simply define risk as the probability of an event to occur. This is what we call *risk 1*. There are additional types of risks, however. We define *risk 2* as the probability of human or material damage associated with a particular type of disaster. These two types of risks can relatively easy be evaluated for short term-disasters. They are limited events which occur only once or at least within a fairly short period of time. If the duration of long-term disasters were predetermined this would pose no problem. But their duration is a function of the behavior or the reaction response of the people involved. When World War I started the political and military leaders in Europe believed that it would be a short war. But that war lasted several years which was not intended by any of the parties involved. Vicious action-reaction cycles led to the unintended and murderous outcomes. Thus, in the case of violence, the risk that this will lead to the intensification of fighting among groups or of groups against the population is always present, i. e. an escalatory process. This is what we call *risk 3*.[4]

[4] In the literature one usually defines thresholds of violence. Bremer (1996) for example, has developed such a model for the study of war. This means that risk 3 actually encompasses an equal number of probabilities, one for each of the thresholds identified. This makes conceptually sense because conflict processes are not continuous but determined by a series of discrete events.

We can identify an additional *risk 4* which indicates the probability that even a small event like a bad harvest ends leads to another disaster, say a violent conflict about scarce renewable resources (cf. Homer-Dixon, 1994). Finally, we are left with a type of risk which is often overlooked, namely the probability that one disaster or a whole series of disasters threaten regional if not international stability, a risk which we have called *risk 5*. This particular risk bridges the conceptual gap between humanitarianism and international security. The relationship among them is represented in Figure 1.

Figure 1:
Types of Risk from a Process Perspective



$D1_{t1}$ = Disaster 1 at time 1
R_i = $Risk_i$, where i= 1 to 5
$D2_{t+3}$ = Disaster 2 at time t+3

Ideally a political strategy should include means to deal with each of these interrelated risks. As we will argue below, political disasters lead to humanitarian disasters and these, in turn may have longer term destabilizing political consequences, intranationally as well as internationally. What about the capacity and willingness of the actors to deal with these risks? This issue we will address next.

4. Capacity to Act

The capacity to act is dependent on two kinds of resources, tangible resources such as money, equipment, and personnel, and intangible resources, primarily knowledge and skills. Both determine the degree to which political strategies for the prevention of, and/or relief in, humanitarian crises, reflect the capacity to do so. Tangible resources, such as peace enforcement troops for example, are a necessary condition for the capacity to act, yet as the disaster in Somalia showed the knowledge and skills as a sufficient condition for that capacity to be effectively used was lacking.

We will ignore in the further discussion the tangible aspect and focus on the intangible part of it. Knowledge is useful on three accounts. First, knowledge contributes to explain the occurrence of an event and identifies its causes. Second, if we can explain it we should also be able to predict its occurrence or at least be able to determine the probability of its occurrence. Prediction, however, does by no means imply also prevention in the more direct meaning, simply because we cannot prevent an earthquake from occurring. In other words, there are predictable events which can also be prevented whereas others can not. Prevention should not be limited conceptually to merely avoid the occurrence of an event. Prevention should also encompass the limitation of risks which, if nothing is done, could increase. Inactivity in the case of an earthquake or a drought would certainly increase the loss of lives. Natural disasters can not be prevented but predicted, human made disasters can in principle be prevented even though there are problems with the prediction (cf. below).

Conceptually, we have to combine the different risks identified with the elements strategies should focus on: prevention (which includes all the risks one to five), and relief (risks 2, 3 and 4). This will give us at least some first plausible assumptions about the capacity to act in terms of knowledge and skills.

Risk 1: With respect to risk 1 even though lacking the necessary special knowledge we can safely assume that both long-term and short-term natural disasters can be predicted relatively accurately within reasonable bounds. But these predictions do not allow the prevention of natural disasters. With respect to human made disasters risk estimates abound about technical accidents, i. e. of nuclear power plants. How accurate

these are is another matter. Even if they were we can still not predict the time when a nuclear accident would happen. To say that a nuclear accident is likely to occur only once every 10,000 years is almost meaningless. There is hardly any real possibility to prevent accidents such as Bhopal, Seveso or Chernobyl. Quite different is the situation with respect to long-term human made disasters. With respect to interstate violence we have some rough insights as to the causes of interstate conflict, about the escalation of military conflicts, the outbreak of war and the widening of wars. The same is true with respect to domestic violence, in particular genocide and politicide, one of the results from the Minorities at Risk project by Gurr and Harff (1998). There is also some good information about famines (Macrae/Zwi, 1994). And if we believe in the models on global warming we know that some parts of the world will increasingly be subject to droughts.

Risk 2: With respect to risk 2 we do have some estimates as to the lethality of short term natural disasters. The damage can be prevented in the sense of reducing the lethality of these kinds of events, as the work done among others by the International Decade for Natural Disaster reduction shows (cf. DFG, 1993). For short term human made disasters knowledge as how to reduce the damage is available as well (including early warning and preparedness). Whether and how that knowledge is implemented is another matter. The crucial issue for this kind of particular risk relates to the long-term disasters, both natural and human made. The best one could probably say is that given past experience we know the conditional probability that risk 2 increases with inaction, especially in vulnerable societies. In this particular case risk is to a large extent determined by the institutional setting, the behavior of the political authorities, the humanitarian actors and the people directly and indirectly affected by the disaster, i. e. a famine when it begins or communal violence when it erupts. In general we assume that a negative correlation exists between the reaction speed of the humanitarian relief operations, the required quantity and quality of relief reaction and the damage incurred.

Risk 3: This particular risk indicates the escalatory probability of longer-term human made and natural disasters. The duration of a drought can hardly be influenced, but that of both famines and violence can be. Neither on logical nor on empirical grounds can we argue that famines must be as lethal and as enduring as they are, nor that vio-

lence must spread or intensify as it has in the past and in the present. In that sense risk 3 consists conceptually of several conditional probabilities if we take a threshold model of disaster for granted. Such processes are determined by discrete steps, decisions and actions, by the parties involved (Bremer, 1996).

What about knowledge and skills? As far as famines are concerned there are studies which describe in some details the dynamics of this escalatory process (cf. Macrae/Zwi, 1994). As far as the dynamics of violence is concerned we do have a whole array of conceptual models, some of which have been empirically tested (cf. Gurr/Harff, 1998). There also is the excellent five volume report among others about Rwanda (cf. Eriksson,1996). Whether and how that knowledge from specific cases can actually be transferred to a higher level of generality is probably worth a research project of its own. Taking the prevention literature at face value the answer would be yes. Looking at the systematic empirical literature, it seems that we know more than we sometimes pretend to know (cf. among others Bercovitch, 1998). Unless the combined political and humanitarian reactivity to potential longer-term disasters is low, not only will damage increase but also the probability that a particular disaster will intensify or escalate.

Risk 4: Turning to risk 4, that is the probability that one disaster, either natural or human made, triggers another disaster, either human made or natural, we must confess that we are at loss. We do not know of any systematic empirical research of this particular issue. Do natural disasters trigger human made disasters? Or, do human made disasters lead to natural disasters (i. e. destruction of the eco-system)?[5] According to our initial research at best a weak relationship seems to exist between natural an human made disasters. We know from Gurr/Harff that political disasters such as a political regime change may trigger another one, leading to what is usually called complex emergencies implying violence against civilians if not genocide. In general some information is available, but as it is quantitative it hardly ever gets acknowledged outside the quantitatively oriented research community.

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[5] See among others the analysis by Brock (1995), also Käkonen (1994).

Risk 5: This particular risk intends to identify the impact of disasters on regional or international stability. Our capacity to act in terms of knowledge is not necessarily as limited as it seems. But as the case of Kosovo shows the dynamics of the process can lead to unintended and undesired results depending on how the various parties involved act and react. This we will find out fairly soon. The impact, however, can only be guessed or "guestimated". That there is one, can be illustrated with two examples. First, the ongoing slaughter in Algeria, which threatens not only the regional stability in the Maghreb but also has already had some destabilizing impact within France. Second, the Kurd issue which has had, and might possibly have further consequences not only in Turkey but also in Germany. It is obvious that this particular type of risk is not primarily humanitarian in nature even though the consequences could be. In general, the capacity to act is difficult to assess in this particular domain.

As this very brief overview reveals each particular risk consists of a combination of capacities in terms of knowledge and skills. Capacity to act is at the same time not just humanitarian in nature, but to a large degree political. Some of it is clearly preventive in nature, related to preparedness and early warning. Some of the risks (particularly 1, 4 and 5) are clearly outside the humanitarian realm proper, whereas with respect to risks 2 and 3 both humanitarian and political preventive as well as reactive responses are required.

5. The Political Context

Thus far we have ignored the political context in which disasters take place, thereby implicitly assuming that the core problem is the disaster itself. This is obviously wrong. First, the context clearly determines both the capacity and willingness to act. Humanitarian assistance is intended to help not only the victims unable to help themselves, as Brauman (1995) says, but by logical implication the societies where disasters occur which are as well presumed to be, or actually are incapable of, helping themselves. Hu-

manitarian assistance is therefore by definition an intervention into the domestic affairs of a third state.[6] This humanitarian intervention poses no problem as long as all the parties involved, donor and recipient states on the one hand, humanitarian organizations and populations on the other, agree. It poses no problem either, when the humanitarian environment or what is sometimes called the humanitarian space (cf. Pilar, 1999) is uncontested and safe.

The problematic cases are those where domestic and/or international violence is involved, that is, where relief organizations are directly active in a violent political and social environment. There is no simple answer to this problem if there is one at all. Violence in general, domestic violence in particular, is most likely to occur in vulnerable societies. Vulnerable societies can be defined as unstable political social systems characterized by high inequality, political and social cleavages, a relatively low level of development and the absence of stable political and social institutions (cf. Buzan, 1991; Holsti, 1991). Two consequences result. One is that any disaster can upset the fragile balance of forces in a vulnerable society and end in violence. Second, humanitarianism gets trapped in a dilemma: under these conditions humanitarian assistance is also a potential if not actual asset manipulated by the warring parties. In other words, where most needed relief is either limited, or misused.

Let us briefly look at the empirical evidence: the distribution of human made disasters related to violence. As can be seen from Table 2 most disruptive disasters, human made disasters in terms of internal and international violence, occur and persist in those regions of the world which are populated by these vulnerable states.[7] These are the problematic cases where major problems related to the political and the humanitarian function of disaster relief arises. This issue of vulnerability goes back to the structure of the international system and the new order created after 1945.

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[6] We do not use the term *intervention* in the legal meaning as laid out in article 2.7 of the UN-Charter, but rather as a matter of fact statement.

[7] Even though we do not present an empirical measure of that we do have the information which allows the construction of such indicators. Some are available such as the Human Deprivation Indices published in the Human Development Reports.

Table 2: Regional Distribution of Civil War Years and Occurrence of International Disputes, 1946-92

Region	Domestic War-Years		International Disputes and Wars	
	N	(%)	N	(%)
North America	-	-	54	(3,7)
Central America	46	(8,8)	59	(4,0)
South America	44	(8,5)	73	(5,0)
Western Europe	-	-	107	(7,3)
Eastern Europe	11	(2,1)	57	(3,9)
Russia/Central Asia	33	(6,3)	81	(5,5)
North Africa	7	(3,1)	74	(5,0)
East Africa	50	(13,1)	73	(5,0)
Central Africa	28	(5,4)	34	(2,3)
West Africa	13	(2,5)	41	(2,8)
Southern Africa	43	(11,0)	57	(3,9)
Middle East	53	(10,2)	358	(24,3)
South Asia	68	(13,1)	113	(7,7)
Southeast Asia	47	(9,0)	260	(17,7)
Oceania	33	(6,9)	31	(2,1)
Total	520	(100,0)	1472	(100,0)

Source: Correlates of War Project (for details see Eberwein/Chojnacki, 1998)

The problematic states where these kind of human disasters occur are weak or quasi-states as Jackson (1990) calls them. They lack the attribute of positive sovereignty. This means that in accordance with the UN-Charter and the international order as established in the wake of World War II (cf. Holsti, 1996) that these weak states are bearers of rights, among others the fundamental right to be protected from foreign intervention. Being unable to do so by themselves, the states in the international system have the obligation to guarantee that right according to the UN-Charter. In principle these "sovereign" governments have all the rights but their populations have none. Sovereignty under this regime means the protection of the territorial integrity of states dominated by weak if not corrupt or even criminal power holders. And this means that at least a certain number of recipient states can manipulate humanitarian relief activities, prevent protective actions by the international community or even bar access to the victims if nongovernmental and governmental organizations do not comply with their de-

mands.[8] As long as the international community does not in general accept, even less enforce the right to life as a fundamental norm of state behavior, so-called humanitarian intervention will remain embedded within the classical power political framework. Strategic or humanitarian interests dominate, thereby also delegitimizing to some extent not only state humanitarianism but also potentially the role of humanitarian organizations themselves. Humanitarianism of the 19th century intended to "humanize" war making, the problem today is to humanize, so to speak, global society at large by protecting civilians as actual and potential victims. Such a new humanitarian international order already found its expression in the two UN General Assembly Resolutions 43/130 from 1988 and 45/100 from 1990 (cf. Bettaty, 1995; Domestici-Met, 1996), where the order issue fundamentally boils down to the question: is there a (human) right of the victim for relief? That would force the states to guarantee and to enforce this human right where necessary. We will come back to that issue later.

6. The Willingness to Act

Crucial for political strategies in any policy field is the willingness to act which presupposes the capacity to do so. Let us assume that the required capacity to act is given. In an article published recently in Foreign Affairs David (1999:104) writes that

> „many now argue that the United States should turn its back on these internal squabbles. These civil wars, they argue, are the domestic affairs of poor, weak countries, not important enough to merit American involvement. Getting enmeshed in complicated disputes and age-old hatreds will sap American resources - and for no good reason".

He continues by saying that

> „being unintended, the spill-over effects of civil wars are not easily deterred, which creates unique challenges to American interests ... Without deterrence as

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[8] Very instructive is the case of the South Sudanese rebels. Originally the US supported the Sudanese Government against them. With Karthoum turning toward the Islamic fundamentalist camp they found themselves supported by the US, notwithstanding their left background (Prunier, 1996).

> a policy option, Washington loses its most effective means of safeguarding its interests" (op. cit. 105).

This short citation helps to clarify the willingness issue. From the state actors' perspective humanitarian disasters in general, violence in particular, is first and foremost a foreign policy respectively an international security issue. This is why David - quite rightly so - speaks of deterrence and not of humanitarianism. The lacking willingness to act is therefore a lack of appreciation of the political consequences of humanitarian disasters which are themselves the consequence of political ones. Quite the opposite can be postulated for the humanitarian organizations. Their willingness to act can be taken for granted, it is their raison d'être and organization survival.

We briefly review the various risks and then suggest a few propositions as to the willingness to act. That disposition depends on the one part from the international system of order which in the end legitimizes the impunity with the perpetration of the most basic humanitarian standards by reference to state sovereignty. It depends to a large degree as well on the willingness to humanize, so to speak the prevailing international order, among others through International Humanitarian Law, its modification and its enforcement

Risk 1: In the last decade preventive diplomacy has become a growth industry, in terms of concepts, in terms of governmental institutions and NGOs[9], and in terms of declaratory policy. Thereby one overlooks the fact, that prevention is what diplomacy in general is all about. The specific results achieved with this new approach (cf. Wallensteen, 1998) are less convincing. Many cases, Rwanda or Kosovo, to mention but two, reveal the lack of willingness on the part of the state community to engage actively in preventive diplomacy. There is no such thing, we would argue, as a humanitarian preventive diplomacy, but just preventive diplomacy proper. To focus just on the prevention of humanitarian disasters as such is ineffective. The focus should not be the humanitarian disaster as the consequence but rather the causes themselves, rooted in the

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[9] A good example is the 1998 International Directory on the Prevention and Management of Violent Conflicts edited by the European Platform for Conflict Prevention, PIOOM and the Berghof Research Institute. It includes about 750 institutions active in this area.

political, social, environmental and economic conditions. For humanitarian NGOs prevention falls neither within their domain of competence nor do they have that capacity.[10]

Risk 2: With respect to this particular risk the willingness to act is high from the humanitarian organizations' perspective, selective from the governments' point of view. The problem with some humanitarian organizations seems to be that they clearly overestimate their capacity to act. Politically, selectivity is not necessarily determined by humanitarian concerns but by strategic considerations as some humanitarian disasters go widely unnoticed or do not get the required attention whereas others do get more than required. In that respect willingness is subject to exogenous influences, primarily the media which play a crucial role in activating this particular disposition of the political actors.

Risk 3: Unless political issues are at stake we could argue that the willingness to act on the part of the interstate system is even lower, in that involvement entails additional incalculable risks. This is not the case if in fact strategic interests play a role. Under these conditions the humanitarian involvement, if not humanitarian intervention by the state actors can either be used to legitimize military involvement or to legitimize the reluctance to deal with the political causes proper. This is one of the reasons why humanitarian organizations, willing to act, are often left alone, not getting the political support required to perform their role. Their willingness to act decreases with the increasing danger for the victims and the volunteers.

Risk 4: We do not have any evidence by and large which would allow us to formulate a well grounded proposition. Our assumption nevertheless is that even though potential linkages between various disasters are perceived and acknowledged, i. e. resource scarcity which indicates gradual degradation such as water, that could lead to humanitarian disasters at a later point. We are confronted to some degree with a lack of capacity, even more so with respect to the willingness to act preventively.

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[10] We will not raise the issue as to the role of the various NGOs involved in peace making- mediation and- as some call it today, peace transformation and peace building. That would merit a separate study.

Risk 5: As the discussion about environment and security suggests (cf. among others Eberwein, 1998) there is widespread disagreement as to whether environmental degradation is a security issue at all. But disasters of any sort are potentially security issues, thus both domestic instabilities and violence should be included in a reconceptualization of what is still understood as *national security* or *the national interest*. The way governments deal with humanitarian disasters suggests that they either refrain to act from the outset or that they assume they can be contained. The willingness to act will increase with the awareness that a political disaster can in fact lead to a diffusion effect. The problem is that once this is perceived to be the case the capacity to act has already decreased.

7. Actors, Roles, and Strategies

We can finally address the question of strategies. As we have argued, a core assumption relates to the complementarity of roles, implying specific responsibilities and specific competencies to deal with humanitarian disasters themselves, their causes and consequences. Complementarity can take on various forms. If the donors are to a great extent government agencies (including international organizations) and link resource allocation with specific conditions, we have what we call *state dominance*. If, however, the humanitarian organizations are independent in their freedom of action by their donors we speak of *societal dominance*. If both operate on the level of parity we can speak of *functional complementarity* or *parity*.

How is the international humanitarian system structured and how should it be structured? Unfortunately there is no clear answer to the first issue. There are, however, some indications that we are dealing with a partially fragmented system. We have numerous NGOs all of them competing in this particular service sector on the donor side (Simmons, 1998). This enhances to some extent state dominance in this particular field. That poses problems on the recipient side as well (cf. Anderson, 1998). Second, we also have concentration tendencies in terms of networks among humanitarian NGOs which point toward oligopolistic tendencies on this market, where some of the larger ones

seem to be exclusive in nature (cf. Topçu, 1999). This is a kind of partial societal dominance. There is, third, a tendency of partial parity in the sense that some larger groups have easier access to political decision makers with a tendency to operate either as quasi-governmental actors or are becoming an integral part of the political decision-making structures (cf. Jean, 1998). This latter case amounts to partial collusion. Finally, we do have what one could call multifunctionality by combining roles and functions of relief activities with human rights, development, and mediation/peace keeping/peace building.

It seems that parity is less prevalent than a mixture of state dominance and societal dominance including the loss of identity of humanitarian relief. That means that humanitarianism is a politicized process, to some extent due to state appropriation of this particular policy field and which tends to be reinforced by the NGO movement at large. The victim turns into a multifunctional object of activity. Is that desirable? We would argue that it is not. We do argue in favor of the parity type of model, even though the following arguments are only a rough first sketch of that concept.[11] How should roles and functions be defined and why? Humanitarian disasters are primarily political failures reflecting shortcomings of the international order. Relief is just one - of many - elements related to a particular conception of international order. The underlying norm should be to safeguard respectively restore the right to life. From the government perspective *humanitarian politics* is therefore security policy in the larger meaning of the term. As such a political humanitarian strategy is therefore a subset of security policy: if international norms are violated there must be collective agreement to enforce their acceptance. But *humanitarian politics* should not be confounded with *humanitarian assistance* proper. In other words both areas of activity are distinct and need to be kept separate. But at the same time they are interdependent (cf. OECD, 1998). Isolating humanitarian assistance conceptually from security policy subordinates it in practice to power politics: politics can act under the banner of humanitarianism which undermines the impartiality of humanitarian at large, and also particularly in the field. Humanitarian assistance may be perceived as a party to an ongoing conflict. Thus, conceptually and in

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[11] We hope to ground our inferences on an empirical analysis which is underway right now. We will also elaborate the conceptual framework that relates to the notion of international institutions and order.

practice we have to distinguish sharply between relief proper, usually administered by the humanitarian organizations, and the conditions of victimization as well as the conditions in the disaster area where relief workers operate, primarily protection of potential and actual victims as well as access and security. Humanitarian politics in that sense includes first and foremost the prevention of the conditions that lead to suffering.

Going back to Figure 1 we can identify four specific domains of strategies related to the specific risks identified. With respect to risk 1, the occurrence of disasters, is from our vantage point, primarily an issue of international order. As crucial as human rights are in general, the minimal standard to achieve would be the compliance with the human right to life and its enforcement in particular. In principle that human right should be the least controversial. The consequence is that international humanitarian law needs to incorporate explicitly the right of the victim to relief (cf. Domenici, 1996). We are well aware that the barriers to such a strategy are formidable because they directly affect the still prevailing notion of sovereignty. Nevertheless this should not exclude prevention. With respect to the second circle, damage, the strategy to pursue would have to be one which supports humanitarian relief and provides the necessary guarantees if not relief enforcement. This directly touches upon the access and protection issues. This is primarily a role of the state actors, a derivative of their responsibility for international order. The problem is how to avoid militarized humanitarianism. With respect to the third circle, the escalation process, again, is not a humanitarian issue as such, it is a political issue which, again is directly related to crisis management, prevention and mediation. The fourth circle, namely the prevention of horizontal escalation, one disaster triggering another, is also an issue primarily related to the political domain, which also holds for the last and final risk, namely the consequences for international stability and also, which should not be forgotten, global governance at large.

How could we define the core elements of strategy design for the nongovernmental organizations? The role of the humanitarian organizations is relief proper, independently, impartially and neutrally. The notion of “independence” is slightly ambiguous since it implies nothing but the postulate that any humanitarian organization is entitled to do what it wants to do. Legitimacy and acceptability of impartial, independent and neutral action can only be maintained if it is so. Any activity is legitimate as long as the

focus is the victim. Any activity which has no clear finality, such as peace-building, democratization or development is neither impartial, independent nor neutral. Thus functional transgressions, so to speak, need to be avoided in order to maintain credibility towards the donors and credibility towards the recipients.

Looking at Figure 1 there is indeed a preventive function for humanitarian organizations with respect to risk 1. One should probably call it preparedness (or even better: early warning ability) rather than prevention. This function overlaps with the one related to risk 2 which includes a high level of professionalization, individually and organizationally such as recruitment and adequate training of volunteers, logistics and the responsibility of the organizations for their staff in the field before and after their specific missions. With respect to risk 3 advocacy for the victims (both against perpetrators in the recipient country as well as against the inactivity of the inter-state system at large) as well as the capacity to mediate among the conflicting parties on the site are additional functions to complement the role of the humanitarian organizations. There is hardly any particular role for humanitarian organizations proper as far as risk 4 is concerned.

This implies a revision or extension of the notion that humanitarian organizations are exponents of civil society. As transnationally operating organizations they do not fit into the classic mould of civil society (cf. Götze, 1998). Their legitimacy derives from the fact that their activity is indicative of political failure, within and between states. Legitimacy however has its price. One of the prices to pay is accountability. One element of that is the adherence to a code of conduct. Added on to this self restraint is the accountability towards the donors, the recipient countries and the public. This raises problems because humanitarian organizations are also service organizations. Finally, accountability also includes transparency of the resource management and allocation because the resources are donations or public subsidies.[12] Competitiveness should not be measured exclusively in terms of success in fund raising and organizational size, but also and primarily so, in terms of the success to provide relief most efficiently.

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[12] According to Siméant (1998) some humanitarian organizations have developed quite effective strategies of “innovative bookkeeping”

8. Capacity and Willingness? - Evaluation and Outlook

One could well argue that the arguments that have been presented are fundamentally idealistic. That may well be true in the sense that they certainly do not reflect reality. Rather reality seems to be quite different, to put it bluntly, but we do not have the space to elaborate the argument:

First, humanitarianism has to some extent become a political means in its own right, thereby detracting from the basic issue, namely from the issue of international order, stability and humanity. Second, competitiveness has increased which has strengthened considerably the role of the donors in general, the states' influence on the other. Third, the humanitarian role seems to become increasingly blurred by burdening it with issues of peacemaking, peacebuilding, mediation or development. That is, the politicization of humanitarian assistance is evident.

Our so-called idealistic approach to create a *humanitarian space.*[13] This construct has a semantic dimension in that it must be clear what humanitarian politics and humanitarian assistance are. It has a clear geographical dimension which relates to the specific area where relief is actually delivered. And it has finally a conceptual dimension referring to humanitarian norms and their being generally accepted as part of the international order as such. This not only includes the formalization in protocols, treaties and conventions but also the adherence to these norms and their enforcement. This latter idea has been inspired by the emergence of other norms in the international system. The international order is not static but changing and that order is always norm based (sovereignty being an outstanding example). A perfect example of this is the abolition of slavery (cf. Ray, 1990). The social movement active in this respect emerged in the early nineteenth century. Only by the end of that century was slavery finally abolished and part of international law. Why was that movement successful? One of the reasons is that this particular norm was specific and, due to normative entrepreneurs, its diffusion was finally institutionalized (cf. Finnemore/Sikkink, 1998). The right to life has just those properties: it is specific and potentially universally acceptable.

Our understanding of designing political strategies is therefore based upon a notion of complementarity of roles of humanitarian and political actors. They need each other which means to acknowledge their interlocking functions. Nevertheless their roles must remain specific and separate, visible to all and distinct.

Both the capacity and willingness to act in order to prevent and mitigate humanitarian disasters vary with respect to the different risks enumerated. Lessons learned from past experience reveal that even though the capacity to act is possibly underestimated the willingness to act is overestimated as far as the governmental actors are concerned. It seems that the opposite holds to some extent for the nongovernmental actors as a result of the "unbound humanitarianism". This seems to be problematic in light of the fact that the coming century will very likely not be more peaceful. Disasters will continue to occur, some countries will probably continue to fall apart and some groups will continue to use violence as a means or for its own sake. And that means more victims!

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[13] From the context it is clear that it is primarily a social construct, as the constructivists would argue, or a general concept which is useful to derive specific attributes characterizing that "space" in practice.

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